

Gullivers satire of women english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Colliquet Alexia Professor Nathalie Rivière de Carles 11 Janvier 2013 M1 MEF
Anglais Commentary on Gulliver Gulliver's Travels was written in 1726 by
Jonathan Swift . This author uses the journey as a major element in his
satire . He creates Captain Lemuel Gulliver who narrates directly to the
reader . This is an adventure story involving four travels of Lemuel Gulliver
who discovers islands with strange people and unusual animals . At this
moment of the book, in Book Two chapter five , Gulliver has left Lilliput (the
country of small creatures) and finds himself in Brobdingnag (the country of
giants). Relativism and travel narrative are the main issues at stake . In this
passage, Gulliver can see the country of giants from his own point of view .
Swift's satire of women in Brobdingnag will lead us to consider this work as a
satire of human condition . It also questions the way Swift treats Gulliver in
his satire . We first shall examine Gulliver's satire of women by first focusing
on the representation of their body and then on moral women in
Brobdingnag . Then we shall concentrate on Gulliver's lost of identity in the
country of giants by first showing the way the Honour of Maids treat Gulliver
and then by analyzing how Gulliver is confronted with terrifying dangers. We
shall finally move on Swift's satire of human condition through his critics on
the country of giants . We first examine Gulliver's satire on women by
showing how their body is represented . Gulliver was brought by
Glumdalclitch to the Maids of Honour to their apartments . They wished to
touch him because he was seen as a curiosity . First he was disgusted by
their smell. Indeed he said : ' because, to say the Truth, a very offensive
smell came from their Skins. ' (lines 19 and 20) . He is overshadowed by the
disgust of their smell . However he recognized that this particular sense is

linked to his small size . He apologized about his reaction by saying : ' But, I conceive, that my Sense was more acute in Proportion to my Littleness . ' (line 21). He is disgusted by their smell because he is smaller than them . He remembers the Lilliputians' reaction to his smell , which he did not understand at this time . Indeed he declared : ' I cannot forget , that an intimate Friend of mine in Lilliput took the Freedom in a warm Day, when I had used a good deal of Exercise, to complain of a strong Smell about me . ' (lines 25 and 26) . In the country of small creatures , Gulliver was bigger than them that's why they were horrified by his smell . Moreover Gulliver is often repulsed by the physicality of the Brobdingnagians whose ordinary flaws are magnified by their huge size . He is not attracted to these women because he is appalled by their appearance . He would find them attractive if he was of their size . He asserts that's ' all those illustrious Persons were no more disagreeable to their Lovers, or to each other, than the People of the same Quality are with us in England ' (lines 21 and 22) . Gulliver is horrified by their enormous and irregular skin . He shows us how horrible can be the human body by describing these women in Brobdingnag . He often uses the words 'horror' and 'disgust' to express his feelings towards them . He states : ' Their Skins appeared so coarse and uneven, so variously coloured when I saw near them, with a Mole here and there as broad as a Trencher, and Hairs hanging from it thicker than Pack-Threads ' (lines 36 and 37) . Gulliver's descriptions of these women are often exaggerated and magnified . This is related to his small size . Gulliver wants to show the readers that beauty is relative . He wants to demonstrate that the truth about objects is influenced by our own perspective . In Brobdingnag , women's flaws are magnified

because Gulliver is close to them . The Lilliputians women looked pretty because Gulliver can't see their flaws closer as he was bigger than them . His travels allow him to see different aspects of human nature . The concept is relativism . It is a key concept in the eighteenth century which shows that we can have see different things because we have our own point of view . The Maids of Honour appeared to be ridiculous - some of them are disgusting but others are noble like the Queen and Glumdalclitch . Indeed he claims : ' Upon this point, I cannot forbear doing justice to the Queen my Mistress , and Glumdalclitch my Nurse ; who Persons were as sweet as those of any Lady in England ' (lines 29 and 30) . Glumdalclitch is the farmer's nine years old daughter . She becomes Gulliver's friend and nurse . Glumdalclitch is skilled at sewing so she makes him new clothes to dress him . When the queen discovers that no one at court is suited to care for Gulliver, she invites her to live at court . The queen is pleasant to Gulliver. She possesses, in Gulliver's words , ' infinite' wit and humour . She is considerate because she asks Gulliver if he would want to live at court instead of staying with the farmer . Although the Maids of Honour are not physically perfect, they are moral . He declares : ' which I do not mention or intend to the Disadvantage of those excellent Ladies , for whom I have all Manner of Respect ' (lines 20 and 21) . Even if he thinks that they are physically repulsive, he respects them because they are moral . Swift praises the Brobdingnagians but he does not want to show us that they are perfect. The women in Brobdingnag don't want to keep him for political or personal reasons, as the Lilliputians do, but they just treat him as a doll . When Gulliver tries to speak with the King of Brobdingnag about England, the king talks about them as ' odious vermin ' ,

showing that they can't talk seriously . Swift wants to point out that even the most appealing system has imperfections and we can see it by scrutinizing them . At the time when Swift was writing Gulliver's Travels , technology was developing . There was the discovery of the microscope through which we can see imperfections that we could not have seen before it . Their size and their superiority make him a ridicule character . Then we will see how Gulliver is treated as a plaything by the Maids of Honour . They considered him as a toy. He goes through a humiliating experience among them when he describes being naked . Women let him play on their naked body . Indeed he asserts : ' They would often strip me naked from Top to Toe , and lay me at full Length in their Bosoms ' (line 18) . Gulliver becomes the sexual plaything of the ladies . To them he is not a man, so they undress in front of him without being embarrassed and they played with him . This abuse of Gulliver, denying his humanity , is done for amusement . Indeed he said : ' For, they would strip themselves to the Skin, and put on their smocks in my Presence , while I was placed on their Toylet directly before their naked Bodies ' (lines 34 and 35) . They offend him by treating him as though he has no sexual significance . This is a process of dehumanization . They play with him as if they are playing with an animal . They just treat him as a puppet without any consideration . He declared : ' That gave me most Uneasiness among these Maids of Honour , when my Nurse carried me to visit them, was to see them use me without any Manner of Ceremony , like a Creature who had no Sort of Consequence ' (lines 31 and 32) . Gulliver really feels unease among these women . When these women play with him , he can see them closer so that their flaws are magnified . He is not attracted to them while

they play with him . He claims : ' which , I am sure, to me was far from being a tempting Sight, or from giving me any other Motions than those of Horror and Disgust ' (lines 35 and 36) . He feels in danger because he is small compared to the Brobdingnagians . There are various animals that endanger his life . The smaller birds did not appear to be afraid of him in the country of giants because they are as big as people living there . He is tiny compared to the creatures of Brobdingnag . At the beginning, Gulliver is surprised because the bird is not afraid of him . He finally succeeded to catch this bird , a Linnet, and he seized him by the neck . One of the servants kill the bird and then they eat him next day for dinner by the Queen's command . Brobdingnag is a country of giants . This means that this country is far more dangerous for people of normal size . He succeeded to catch a bird bigger than him and so Gulliver is proud of it . He asserted : ' But , one Day , I took a thick Cudgel and threw it with all my strength so luckily at a Linnet , that I knocked him down , and seizing him by the Neck with both my Hands , ran with him in Triumph to my nurse ' (lines 8, 9 and 10). Gulliver has to struggle to fight against the possible dangers in Brobdingnag . In his book entitled Purity and Defilement in Gulliver's Travels (1987) , Charles Hinnant defines a type of travel narrative . According to him , ' the ' castaway ' narrative (is) exemplified in contemporary accounts of marooned men (...) (where) the protagonist is thrown into an unfamiliar world (...) in which he is confronted wit terrifying dangers and forced to use all his energies in a bitter struggle for survival ' . Gulliver has to struggle to survive among the giants . Gulliver's defense against women who are humiliating him is to deny the obvious sexual desire he feels upon seeing their body parts . Gulliver has

many accidents in Brobdingnag . For example, a bird of prey nearly grabs him and a monkey snatches him and carries him to the roof of the Palace where he is rescued . In this passage, Gulliver has to struggle against the humiliating experience . This is a satire against women . Swift writes an ironic poem on women entitled ' A Beautiful Nymph Going to Bed ' in 1731 . He also criticizes women in this poem . This is a satirical poem describing the disturbing experiences as a woman, Corinna, who is working in the eighteenth century Britain sex industry . The word 'bed ' can represent the domestic sphere . In the eighteenth century in Britain, women only had to do the household work . Corinna awakens in a bad way . Her glass eye was stolen by rat and her wig infested by dog's fleas . She tries to put in order the different parts of herself . Swift shows us her artificial appearance : her hair is a wig; one eye is a glass and her teeth are false . At this time in poems, women are praised for their charms . On the contrary , in Swift's poem, this is a satiric vision of women . Corinna is both morally and physically ugly . Swift depicted the ugliness of human body when they are natural . Swift often mentions the female body with repugnance as in Gulliver's Travels . In the country of giants, Swift examines everything as if through a microscope . Everything is seen from Gulliver's point of view . For example, a young gentleman asked Gulliver and Glumdalclitch to come and see an execution . He hates this scene of horror but he is curious to see it . Gulliver is not disgusted by this scene of horror because he is far away from the execution . The ridicule comparison between the Jet d'Eau at Versailles and the execution show us that Gulliver perceived this scene from another point of view . His only reaction is to jump when the head falls . Indeed he

said : ' and the Head when it fell on the Scaffold Floor, gave such a bounce, as made me start, although I were at least an English mile distant ' (lines 53 and 54) . Instead of being a disgusting scene, this execution appeared to him as an astonishing event . This is relativism which is a key concept in the eighteenth century . Through women's satire , Swift criticizes the human condition . Gulliver makes the connexion that the women of England , that he normally finds so beautiful, have the same flaws , but he just does not see them as easily because they are not the same size . Indeed he said : ' But , I conceive , that my Sense was more acute in Proportion to my Littleness ' (line 21) . These are subjective values linked to different perspectives . Gulliver's perceptions are gullible as his name suggests . He is unable to reflect on himself or his English nation . Gulliver has difficulties to integrate into Brobdingnag because he is different from them . He feels alone among these giants . Swift criticizes the excesses of individualism . He wants to show us that the Brobdingnagians are not perfect creatures . Gulliver's Travels is a satirical travel literature book . Thus Swift can compare the ways of humanity, especially those of the English , with several ways of living . Swift uses the size of the Brobdingnagians to show the ugliness underneath most of humans. This novel is an attack on humanity and reflects on Swift's moral, philosophical and scientific thoughts of the time . The imperfect but highly moral Brobdingnagians represent an utopia for Swift . He was influenced by the English philosopher , Thomas More . Although the Brobdingnagians are magnified with their flaws, they are highly moral compared to the English nation . In Gulliver's Travels , Swift uses the size of the Brobdingnagians as a sign of their high morality and compared to them

Gulliver has low standards . Gulliver is really small compared to them so it shows that he is vulnerable among them . It can be a satire of the fragility of the human body . Gulliver is repulsed by women in the country of giants . The disgust of women foreshadows his rejection of his wife . He physically rejected them so he cannot past their physical being and see that they are highly moral than the English nation . Gulliver's Travels is a satire against humankind through its different travels. Satire was used as Swift's defense against humankind . He thinks that people are generally ridiculous, greedy and proud . Swift was not optimistic about the Age of Science . At that time, most of people believed that it was successful . However , Swift believes that science needs limits . Swift also uses satire to criticize the different aspects of human nature . Indeed he states that ' the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that Nature even suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth .' Swift uses exaggeration to criticize women . For example he said : ' Their Skins appeared so coarse and uneven , so variously coloured when I saw near them with a Mole here and there as broad as a Trencher , and Hairs hanging from it thicker than Pack-Threads' (lines 36, 37 and 38) . Swift wants to show us as horrible can be the human body by using exaggeration . The satirical technique Swift uses is to attack modernity . He is concerned about the growing power in Europe . He wants to tell the society what he really thinks of them . For example, in the country of Brobdingnagians, he uses them because they show off by using Gulliver for entertainment . This reflects that people in society likes to show off . Moreover Swift wants to demonstrate that some people can abuse of power in society . The Brobdingnagians could abuse of power if they want because they are

physically superior to Gulliver . The Lilliputians, conversely, abuse of power as taking advantage on the gullible nature of Gulliver by holding him prisoner . Besides Swift also uses satire to show us a contrast between his descriptions of bodily functions and the descriptions of rationality . Swift wants to remind the society that underneath their pretention and rationality , they are made of the same flaws . Through his satire, Swift wants to highlight that knowledge does not mean wisdom . Lilliputians have knowledge but they just want to gain power . The Brobdingnagians, conversely , don't have knowledge but they are moral . Gulliver's Travels is a humorous and critical satire which attacks British and European society . Swift criticizes women by focusing on the representation of their body . Their flaws are magnified through Gulliver's point of view . It shows that all beauty is relative . Gulliver is treated like a doll by the Maids of Honour and he is deprived of humanity . Gulliver is exposed to many dangers such as the Linnet in the country of Brobdingnagians . Through Gulliver's Travels , Swift depicts a satire of humanity and the English nation . Gulliver's Travels is one of the most important satire in literature . Irony is one of the most considerable weapons of satire . Swift criticizes the political life of his time, the monarchy, the courts, the English nation and the European institution . Swift often uses irony to talk about human nature . Swift uses irony in The Modest Proposal because he wants the readers to recognize inhumanity of people when it is linked to social problems . Swift often uses irony to point out problems in society so that the readers can become aware of them .